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Ruiten, Jacques T.A.G.M. van

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THE REWRITING OF NUMBERS 22–24 IN PSEUDO-PHILO,  
*LIBER ANTIQUITATUM BIBLICARUM* 18

Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten

The subject of this contribution is the rewriting and interpretation of the Balaam story in the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (*LAB*) of Pseudo-Philo. This work is usually classified as belonging to the literary genre of the ‘rewritten Bible’. It follows a large part of the biblical story, that is, from Genesis until the second book of Samuel, which is to say, from the creation of Adam until the death of Saul.<sup>1</sup> The work dates from the second part of the first century CE, and is one of the latest examples of the ‘rewritten Bible’ as, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the standardization of the biblical text, there was no longer a place for such phenomenon.<sup>2</sup>

The term ‘rewritten Bible’ was coined by Vermes who describes it as a midrashic insertion of *haggadic* development into the biblical narrative in order to anticipate questions and to solve problems in advance.<sup>3</sup> The ‘rewritten Bible’ follows Scriptures, but includes a considerable number of additions and interpretative developments.<sup>4</sup> According to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. D.J. Harrington, ‘Pseudo-Philo’, in: J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, II, London 1985, 297–377, esp. 297. It is possible that *LAB* is not complete in itself, but that it should continue until the end of the Second Book of Kings, where the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 is described. Cf. M.R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, London 1917, 60–5, 73; G. Kisch, *Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Publications in Mediaeval Studies. The University of Notre Dame X), Notre Dame 1949, 29; C. Dietzfelbinger, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Jüdische Studien aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit II.2), Gütersloh 1975, 96–7; D.J. Harrington, *Pseudo-Philon: Les Antiquités Bibliques*, I (Sources Chrétiennes 229), Paris 1976, 21. In contrast, Jacobson is inclined to believe that the *LAB* is complete. Cf. H. Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, I (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 31), Leiden 1996, 253–254. See also C. Perrot & P.M. Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon: Les Antiquités Bibliques*, II (Sources Chrétiennes 230), Paris 1976, 21–2.

<sup>2</sup> The need for interpretation continues, however. The most important examples of interpretation of the standardized text of the Hebrew Bible are ‘midrash’ and ‘targum’.

<sup>3</sup> G. Vermes, ‘The Life of Abraham’, in: G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, Leiden 1961, 67–126, esp. 95. Cf. also Perrot & Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon*, 22–8.

<sup>4</sup> E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–135 A.D.)*, III.1, Revised and Edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar, & M. Goodman, Edinburgh 1986, 326.

Nickelsburgh, the 'rewritten Bible' is 'very closely related to the biblical texts, expanding and paraphrasing them and implicitly commenting on them'.<sup>5</sup> It follows a sequential, chronological order. Although it makes use of biblical words and phrases, these words and phrases are not set apart by way of quotation formula or lemma, but are integrated into a seamless retelling of the biblical story.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, interest in the nature of biblical interpretation in early Jewish literature has grown.<sup>7</sup> From the exile onwards, the books of the Pentateuch were the subject of interpretation. Kugel enumerates some fundamental assumptions about Scripture that characterize all ancient biblical interpretation.<sup>8</sup> The Bible was read as a cryptic document with hidden meanings. It was a fundamentally relevant document for the interpreters and their audience. It was perfect and perfectly harmonious. This meant that there could be no mistake in the Bible. There could be no contradiction between what was said in one passage and what was said in another. Every apparent contradiction was an invitation to reveal the real, but hidden meaning of it. Quite often problems in the biblical text provided the clue for an interpretation. Halpern-Amaru has pointed out that polemical and theological interests and biblical interpretation are interwoven. Only close textual analysis could unravel that weave.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the portrayal of Balaam in the Bible, there seems to be an internal contradiction.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, there seems to be a positive picture of the prophet in Numbers 22–24. Balaam is a

<sup>5</sup> G.W.E. Nickelsburgh, 'The Bible Rewritten and Expanded', in: M.E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (Compendium Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum II.2), Assen 1984, 89–156, esp. 89.

<sup>6</sup> P.S. Alexander, 'Retelling the Old Testament', in: D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson (eds), *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars*, Cambridge 1988, 99–121, esp. 116–7.

<sup>7</sup> For the following, see J.L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, Cambridge, Mass. 1997, 1–49.

<sup>8</sup> Kugel, *Bible*, 17–23.

<sup>9</sup> B. Halpern-Amaru, *The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism Series 60), Leiden 1999, 136.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, Stuttgart 1948, 81–5; Cf. G. Vermes, 'The Story of Balaam', in: Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 127–77, esp. 175–176; W. Gross, *Bileam: Literar- und formkritische Untersuchung der Prosa in Num 22–24* (StANT, 38), München 1974; J.A. Hackett, 'Balaam', *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, 569–572; Kugel, *Bible*, 482–95; D. Frankel, 'The Deuteronomical Portrayal of Balaam', *Vetus Testamentum* 46 (2004) 30–42; M.L. Barré, 'The Portrait of Balaam in Numbers 22–24', *Interpretation* 51 (2004) 254–66. See also the contribution by E. Noort in this volume.

prophet who blesses Israel and curses its enemies. He even predicts the Messiah. On the other hand, there are several passages in which the portrayal of Balaam is very negative. For example, Num 31:16: ‘These women here, on Balaam’s advice, made the Israelites act treacherously against the Lord in the affair of Peor, so that the plague came among the congregation of the Lord’. This text ascribes the sin of Israel in Numbers 25 to Balaam. He advises the women of Moab to seduce Israel. The killing of Balaam by the sons of Israel (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22) seems to be the result of his negative advice. Other texts show that Balaam had in fact tried to curse Israel, but in the end God did not listen, and he is the one who changed the curse into a blessing (Deut 23:5–6; Josh 24:9–10).

In the light of the assumptions behind ancient biblical interpretation, it is understandable that most pre-critical interpreters have problems with the ambiguous portrayal of Balaam in the Bible. We have to realize that the point of departure both for Pseudo-Philo as well as for the other early Jewish authors is the final form of the text. They could not divide the complete biblical story of Balaam into several layers (for example, Yahwistic, Elohist, Priestly) in order to solve this problem of contradiction.<sup>11</sup> The assumption of the perfect harmony of the Bible and the impossibility of mistake meant that although there is a completely conflicting portrayal of Balaam, there can be no contradiction between differing passages. On the basis of the negative portrayal of Balaam, many interpreters have raised the question of whether the description of Balaam in Numbers 22–24 is purely positive. Why does Balaam receive the messengers of Balak a second time? What is the meaning of the story of the ass in relation to Balaam? Is the portrayal of Balaam as positive as it seems at first glance?<sup>12</sup> In most cases of early Jewish and early Christian exegesis, this leads to a completely negative interpretation of Balaam. Every innocent word or gesture of Balaam in Numbers 22–24 is interpreted in a negative way.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For the development of the Balaam traditions, cf. M.S. Moore, *The Balaam Traditions: Their Character and Development* (SBLDS, 113), Atlanta, Ga. 1990; J.T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters: A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions* (Brown Judaic Studies, 244) Atlanta, Ga., 1992; H. Seebass, *Numeri IV/3* (BKAT, IV.3), Neukirchen-Vluyn 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Kugel, *Bible*, 484.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Vermes, ‘Story of Balaam’, 127–177; Perrot and Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon*, 124–125; L.H. Feldman, *Prolegomenon* to M.R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, New York 1971, C.

Relatively speaking, Pseudo-Philo pays a lot of attention to the rewriting of the Balaam story in *LAB* 18. It is difficult, however, to evaluate his interpretation of Balaam. Does he interpret Balaam in a positive or in a negative sense? Is the prophet a hero for Israel,<sup>14</sup> or should he be called a villain?<sup>15</sup> In order to give an answer to this question, I will firstly provide an overall comparison between Numbers 22–24 and *LAB* 18. At the level of the macrostructure, the similarities and dissimilarities between both texts will be surveyed. I will also consider some of the characteristics of the narrative technique of the rewriting. Secondly, I will discuss in more detail the dissimilarities between both texts that are related to the ambiguity of Balaam. I will go through the text, and point to elements that are related to it. I refer here to the synoptic overview in the appendix to this article, where the full text of Numbers 22–24 and *LAB* 18 can be found.<sup>16</sup> Below I will attempt to give a classification of all the similarities and dissimilarities between Numbers 22–24 and *LAB* 18.

*An Overall Comparison of Numbers 22–24 and  
Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum 18*

*LAB* 18 can be considered as a rewriting of Numbers 22–24. It contains many transformations, which are brought about by problems in the biblical text. There are also many transformations, however, which seem, at first sight, to have no clue in the biblical text at all. Pseudo-Philo has explicitly connected Numbers 22–24 with events in the narrative context, and it is more accurate to say that, in *LAB* 18, he is retelling Num 21:21–25:18.<sup>17</sup> The preceding passage in which the victory of Israel over the kings of the Amorites is described (Num 21:21–22:1) forms, in the eyes of Pseudo-Philo, the necessary background of the fear of Balak, whereas the integration of Numbers 25 (and Numbers

<sup>14</sup> According to Vermes ('Story of Balaam', 174) Balaam is a tragic hero. His only desire is to do the will of God. When he realized that he had been deceived by Balak, he committed spiritual suicide by giving evil advice to the king. Departing in joy, hopeless in the end.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobson, *Commentary*, 611.

<sup>16</sup> In the latter part (*LAB* 18:10–13, and Num 22:36–24:24), I refrained from putting both texts side by side, because they are too different. Therefore I decided to give only the text of the *LAB* and refer to the biblical text in the margins.

<sup>17</sup> The rewriting of the story of Balaam in *LAB* 18 is preceded by Korah's rebellion (*LAB* 16; cf. Numbers 16) and Aaron's rod (*LAB* 17; cf. Numbers 17), and is followed by Moses' farewell, prayer, and death (*LAB* 19), which combines several elements from Deuteronomy 31–34.

31:16) in Numbers 22–24 shows the problem of the ambiguity of the portrayal of Balaam. The seducing of the people after the daughters of Moab is a direct consequence of the prophecy of Balaam. As far as the narrative structure of Numbers 22–24 is concerned, Pseudo-Philo follows this quite closely, as can be seen in the following table.

<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i></b>
<i>I. 21:21–22:4: The Exposition</i>	<i>I. 18:1–2c: The Exposition</i>
<i>II. 22:5–14: The First Invitation</i>	<i>II. 18:2d–7f: The First Invitation</i>
a. 5–7: Invitation of Balak mediated by messengers	a. 2d–l: Invitation of Balak
b. 8: Response Balaam	b. 3: Response Balaam
c. 9–12: Meeting God and Balaam	c. 4–6: Meeting God and Balaam
d. 13–14: Balaam’s response (refusal)	d. 7a–f: Balaam’s response (refusal)
<i>III. 22:15–35: The Second Invitation</i>	<i>III. 18:7g–9: The Second Invitation</i>
a. 15–17: Invitation Balak mediated by messengers	a. 7g–o: Invitation Balak
b. 18–19: Response Balaam	b. 8a–e: Response Balaam
c. 20: Meeting God and Balaam	c. 8f–i: Meeting God and Balaam
d. 21: Departure Balaam	d. 8j–k: Departure Balaam
e. 22–35: The story of the ass	e. 9a–i (Elements of the) story of the ass
<i>IV. 22:36–24:25: The Discourses of Balaam</i>	<i>IV. 18:10–14: The Discourse of Balaam</i>
<i>A. The Arrival Balaam</i> 22:36–40: Arrival Balaam in the land of Moab	<i>A. The Arrival Balaam</i> 10a: Arrival Balaam in the land of Moab
<i>B. The oracles and the narrative context</i>	<i>B. The oracle and the narrative context</i>
1. 22:41–23:12: First attempt to curse	
a. 22:41: Location I (Bamoth Baal) [Balaam sees the <i>extremity</i> of the people (קצה העם)]	
b. 23:1–3: Preparation of the meeting with God (Balak builds seven altars and Balak and Balaam offer)	b. 10b–d: Preparation (Balaam builds an altar and offers [10bc]; Balaam sees a <i>part</i> of the people ( <i>partem populi</i> ) [10d])

Table (*cont.*)

Numbers	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i>
c. 23:4–5: Balaam meets God d. 23:6: Balaam returns to Balak e. 3:7–10: FIRST ORACLE f. 23:11: Reaction Balak g. 3:12: Response Balaam	
2. 23:13–26: Second attempt to curse a. 23:13–14a: Locations II (Field of Zophim, top of Pisgah) b. 23:14b–15: Preparation of the meeting with God (seven altars) c. 23:16: Balaam meets YHWH d. 23:17: Balaam returns to Balak e. 23:18–24: SECOND ORACLE f. 3:25: Reaction Balak g. 23:26: Response Balaam	
3. 23:27–24:19: Third attempt to curse a. 3:27–28: Location III (top of Peor) b. 23:29–30: Preparation of the meeting with God (seven altars) c. 24:1–2: Spirit of God upon Balaam d. – e. 24:3–9: THIRD ORACLE f. 24:10–11: Reaction Balak g. 24:12–14: Response Balaam e'. 24:15–19: FOURTH ORACLE	c. 10e: Spirit of God does <i>not</i> abide in him  e. 10f–12p: ORACLE f. 12qr: Reaction Balak g. 13: Response Balaam
4. 24:20–24: Three short Oracles – 20: against Amalek – 21–22: against the Kenite – 23–24: against Kittim	
<i>V. Closure of the Story</i>	<i>V. Closure of the Story</i>
24:25: Departure of Balaam [25:1–18: Idolatry with Baal Peor]	14a–c: Departure of Balaam 14d–e: Seducing after the daughters of Moab

The text of Numbers can be divided into five parts.<sup>18</sup> The story is framed by the exposition (I: Num 21:21–22:4) and the closure (V: Num 24:25). Between the beginning and the end, the main body of Numbers 22–24 can roughly be divided into two parts. The first part (Num 22:1–35) is formed by the attempts of Balak to persuade Balaam to curse Israel. This part can be divided into two subunits: the first invitation (II: Num 22:5–14) and the second invitation (III: Num 22:15–35). The second part is formed by the discourses of Balaam (IV: Num 22:36–24:25) embedded in their narrative context. The repetitions in this part of the text are noticeable. After the arrival of Balaam (A: Num 22:36–40), the rest of the text (B: Num 22:41–24:24) can mainly be divided into three subunits with more or less the same structure, having seven recurring elements: B1 (Num 22:41–23:12), B2 (Num 23:13–26), B3 (23:27–24:19). Unit B1 and unit B2 in particular are very much in parallel. Unit B3 deviates in so far as there is no meeting between God and Balaam, but the spirit of God enters Balaam. There is also a fourth oracle, which is connected with the response of Balaam.

The overview makes clear that *the framework* of the narrative of Numbers 22–24 is clearly recognizable in LAB 18.<sup>19</sup> The exposition (I) occurs in 18:1–2c, the closure (V) in 18:14abc.<sup>20</sup> Also, the first invitation (II) and the second invitation (III) are clearly recognizable (resp. 18:2d–7f, and 18:7g–9). The story of the ass, which is part of the second invitation, is very much abbreviated. As far as the discourses of Balaam are concerned (IV), the most important difference between both texts is the fact that Numbers has four oracles of Balaam (22:41–24:19), with three additional short oracles (24:20–24), whereas Pseudo-Philo (v. 10–13) has one oracle. However, many of the recurring elements in the narrative context of the oracles also occur in LAB 18, but only once.

This overall comparison of Numbers 22–24 and LAB 18 shows that the narrative structure of both texts is highly comparable. However, the content of these parallel texts is very different. In the synoptic overview,<sup>21</sup> it is clear that apart from some *verbatim quotations* (often with *variations*),

<sup>18</sup> For a different understanding of the structure, see, e.g., B.A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20* (AB 4), New York 1993, 139–41.

<sup>19</sup> For a study of the structure of LAB 18, see E. Reinmuth, *Pseudo-Philo und Lukas: Studien zum Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum und seiner Bedeutung für die Interpretation des lukanischen Doppelwerks* (WUNT 74), Tübingen 1994, 58–62.

<sup>20</sup> Pseudo-Philo connects the closure of the story of Numbers 22–24 with Numbers 25 (LAB 18:14dc).

<sup>21</sup> See the synoptic overview in the appendix of this article.



there are many *omissions* and *additions* in *LAB* 18.<sup>22</sup> In the following I will attempt to unravel the various threads of the author's exegetical techniques, the traditional elements from biblical and non-biblical sources which exert influence on *LAB* 18.<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes the text of Pseudo-Philo is somewhat disturbing with regard to the narrative technique. I shall give two examples.<sup>24</sup> One of the striking things at the beginning of the text is that Pseudo-Philo (*LAB* 18:2d–7) does not adopt the 'messengers' of Numbers 22 (v. 5–14). In *LAB* 18:2d the text reads: 'He sent to Balaam', but it is not mentioned who was sent. In Numbers, the messengers act prominently. They are called 'the messengers' (v. 5a), but also 'the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian' (v. 7a), 'the princes of Moab' (v. 8d), 'the princes of Balak' (v. 13b), and 'the princes of Moab' (v. 14a). They are not only mentioned by name, but they also have a clear function. They have to bring the message of Balak to Balaam, and they have also brought some instruments to do so (v. 7a–c). In *LAB* 18, it appears as if Balak speaks directly to Balaam. There are no intermediaries. Once Balaam is speaking, there seems to be more people involved, however: 'and now wait (*expectate*: pluralis) here' (v. 3f). The inconsistency becomes completely clear when, after the response of Balaam, Gods says: 'Who are the men who have come to you?' (v. 4b).

<sup>22</sup> When a passage in the *LAB* deviates from the parallel passage in MT Numbers, it is not always possible to ascertain whether the deviation reflects the hand of the author or the text of his *Vorlage*. The comparison of Numbers and *LAB* is complicated by the fact that one should establish which Hebrew biblical text the author had in front of him when he composed his book. Harrington has compared the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* with the extant versions of Numbers and concluded that the biblical text of the *LAB* would have been a Palestinian text type. It agrees sometimes with LXX, at others with Samaritan Pentateuch or the MT, but is independent from them. Cf. D.J. Harrington, 'The Biblical Text of Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33 (1971) 1–17. One should always remain aware of this problem. The methodological problem is even more complicated. The *LAB* is preserved in Latin, but since the study of Cohn in 1898 it is universally accepted that the Latin is a translation of the Greek, and that underlying the Greek there must have been a Hebrew original. Cf. L. Cohn, 'An Apocryphal Work Ascribed to Philo of Alexandria', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 10 (1898) 277–332; D.J. Harrington, 'The Original Language of Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*', *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970) 503–14.

<sup>23</sup> Important research on the biblical interpretation in *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* has been done by F.J. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo: Rewriting the Bible*, New York 1993; H. Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, I–II* (AGAJU, 31), Leiden 1996.

<sup>24</sup> The examples are taken from H. Jacobson, 'Biblical Quotation and Editorial Function in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*', *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 5 (1989) 47–64, esp. 54–5.

A comparable problem with regard to the narrative technique can be found in LAB 18:2i–k: ‘And now come, and curse this people because they are too many for us’. This is a quotation of Num 22:6a–c, with some variations: ‘And now come, curse this people for me, because they are too mighty for me’. The reference to ‘this people’ is completely clear in the biblical text since the people had just been mentioned (Num 22:5b–d: ‘Behold, a people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me’). However, this aspect is omitted in LAB 18. As a consequence ‘this people’ has no reference in this text.

Another interesting phenomenon in the rewriting of Pseudo-Philo is the fact that there seem to be *conflated quotations*. I will provide two examples to explain this technique. I refer to LAB 18:3fg: ‘And now wait here, and I will see what the Lord may say to me this night’. At first sight, these lines seem to refer to Num 22:8. However, it is striking that some words in LAB 18:3 do not occur in the biblical text: ‘and now’, ‘I will see’, and ‘what’. Moreover, it is doubtful whether the word ‘wait’ is an adequate rendering of לִינִי (Lodge). Finally, ‘this night’ is transposed to the next sentence. One could say, of course, that Pseudo-Philo gives a free rendering of Num 22:8. However, when one looks at Num 22:19, where Balaam answers the second group of messengers, then it seems as if LAB 18:3 is rendering Num 22:19 (as in LAB 18:8).<sup>25</sup> The missing words from LAB 18:3 ‘and now’, ‘I will see’, and ‘what’ do occur in Num 22:19. ‘Wait’ seems to be an adequate rendering of שָׁבוּ (wait) from Num 22:19, whereas ‘I will see’ also renders וְאֵדָעָה (I will know) from Num 22:19 in a plausible way. Finally, the rendering of ‘this night’ in LAB 18:3g at the end of the second sentence might be influenced by Num 22:20, where it is said that God came to Balaam in the night.

A second example is LAB 18:4a: ‘And God said to him by night’. This could be a rendering of Num 22:9, although the words ‘to him’ and ‘by night’ do not occur in Numbers, whereas the words ‘came to Balaam’ do not occur in LAB 18:4a. However, in the parallel phrase in the second invitation, that is, Num 22:20a, the words ‘to him’ and ‘at night’ are found. It is possible that in his formulation of the first invitation Pseudo-Philo is influenced by the formulation in the second.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Jacobson, ‘Biblical Quotation’, 55–56.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobson, ‘Biblical Quotation’, 56.

More striking are the many *omissions* and *additions*. When looking at the synoptic overview, one could get the impression that we are dealing with two completely different kinds of texts that bear no relation whatsoever. In some cases, however, omissions in one text are connected to additions in the other text, although at different places. The difference with the above-mentioned category of conflated quotations is not completely clear. I will give a few examples. Firstly, Num 22:5d reads ‘and they are dwelling opposite me’. This has no direct counterpart in *LAB* 18. However, we see more or less the same phrase in *LAB* 18:2b: ‘and he was living opposite them’. Secondly, Num 22:6f–h reads ‘for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed’. This has no obvious counterpart in *LAB* 18. Moreover, this raises a question: how is it that Balak knows this about Balaam? In *LAB* 18:2g–h, we are given the answer: ‘Behold I know that in the reign of my father Zippor, when the Amorites fought him, you cursed them and they were handed over before him’.<sup>27</sup> Thirdly, Num 22:17a (that is, in the second invitation) reads ‘for I will surely do you great honor’. However, we see that this is quoted in *LAB* 18:2l: ‘and I will do you great honor’. Num 22:17a is followed by the request to curse the people in Num 22:17d: ‘Curse this people for me’, whereas *LAB* 18:2l is preceded by this request in *LAB* 18:2j: ‘Curse this people’.

### *The Ambiguity of Balaam*

Most noticeable are the additions in *LAB* 18 that give no direct clue, as far as the wording is concerned, to the biblical text of Numbers. For example, *LAB* 18:3b–g, 4d–h, 5b–6e, 7i–o, 8bc, hi, 10h–13. For the most part, Pseudo-Philo’s portrait of Balaam in the rewriting is very positive. Balaam is a prophet who does not want to curse Israel, and who listens to the God of his chosen people. Balaam seems to have no passion for money, and he is not corrupt. He is not influenced by the offers of Balak’s messengers. In the end, however, it is said that although he blesses Israel, he is not blessed himself, and moreover that he gives negative advice about Israel to Balak. As I go through the text, I will pay particular attention to the portrayal of Balaam in *LAB*.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jacobson, *Commentary*, 577–578.

*The First Invitation* (LAB 18:2d–7f)

The additions in LAB 18:3 make clear that the future cursing of Israel gives pleasure to Balak. He seems to be convinced that this curse will succeed as it did when Balaam cursed the Amorites (cf. LAB 18:2gh). Balaam explains, however, that success in the past does not guarantee future success. God's plans are not man's (or Balak's) plans. Moreover, the gift of inspiration is given only temporarily (cf. LAB 18:3d),<sup>28</sup> whereas God determines what is the correct way.<sup>29</sup> The additions make clear that Balaam can say only what is inspired by God.

The additions in LAB 18:4 can in a certain sense be related to Num 22:10–11. Whereas Balaam's answer to God's question in Numbers seems to imply that God did not know the answer, LAB shows that Balaam, in Pseudo-Philo, interprets the question asked by God as a rhetorical question.<sup>30</sup> God's question is in fact a test. Subsequently, Balaam proclaims God's omniscience (LAB 18:4f) and his creative power (18:4g). In the end, Balaam refers to himself as 'your servant' (LAB 18:4h). Elsewhere in LAB, Abraham and Moses are called 'servant'.<sup>31</sup> The designation 'your servant' for Balaam seems to express Pseudo-Philo's high esteem.

God's answer in LAB 18:5–6 follows the first request of Balak to curse Israel (LAB 18:2d–l). Balaam obtains God's advice (LAB 18:3fg). Although the wording is different in Numbers and LAB 18, the result in both cases is God's refusal. Whereas in Num 22:12 it is stated quite simply: 'You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed', the answer in LAB 18:5–6 is much more elaborate and related to the patriarchal narratives of Genesis.

In his answer, God recalls firstly the numerous offspring of Abraham (LAB 18:5b–d). The promise occurs many times in Genesis (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 17:2, 4–6, 16, 20; 18:18; 21:12; 22:17 etc.). In two

<sup>28</sup> This seems to be the interpretation of LAB 18:3d: 'Now he does not realize that the spirit that is given to us is given for a time'. The spirit of God enters men temporarily on the occasion of their inspiration. So Jacobson, *Commentary*, 579.

<sup>29</sup> So LAB 18:3e: 'Our ways are not straight unless God wishes it'.

<sup>30</sup> The reply of Balaam in LAB 18:4 is the reply he ought to have given according to *Midrash Numbers Rabbah* 20:6. See Vermes, 'Story of Balaam', 131–2; Feldman, *Prolegomenon*, ci; Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo*, 85; Jacobson, *Commentary*, 581.

<sup>31</sup> See LAB 6:11: 'Why do you not answer me, Abram servant of God?' 20:2: 'Did I not speak on your behalf to Moses my servant?' See also LAB 15:5: 'I will tell my servants, their fathers'; 38:4.

of the occurrences, a comparison is made between Abraham's descendants and the stars of heaven, that is, in Gen 15:5 and Gen 22:17. Most commentators refer only to Gen 22:17: 'I will make your seed as many as the stars of the heaven', as the source of LAB 18:5d because of the continuation of the text (LAB 18:5ghi) where Pseudo-Philo refers to the Aqedah (Genesis 22).<sup>32</sup> However, it is also possible to point to Gen 15:5: 'Look toward *heaven*, and number *the stars*, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him: *So shall your seed be*'. It is striking that Gen 15:1 speaks about a vision: 'After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram *in a vision*', as in LAB 18:5b. It is possible that we are dealing with a conflation of two parallel texts. The first part of LAB 18:5d: 'Your seed will be', derives from Gen 15:5, and the second part: 'like the stars of the heaven', from Gen 22:17.<sup>33</sup>

God continues by combining the promise of numerous offspring with the tradition that God has lifted Abraham above the firmament and shown him the universe (LAB 18:5ef). This theme also occurs in *Testament of Abraham* 10–14, 2 *Baruch* 4:4, and *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 44:12. Is it possible to link this passage to Gen 15:5a: 'And he brought him outside'? In that case, we have here an early reference to a midrash on Gen 15:5.<sup>34</sup>

After this, God reminds Abraham of the offering of Isaac, Genesis 22 (LAB 18:5g–k). God says that he demanded Isaac as a holocaust, and because Abraham did not refuse, his offering was acceptable for God.<sup>35</sup> Although Isaac was not sacrificed,<sup>36</sup> God declares that he has chosen Israel because of his blood.<sup>37</sup> Balak tries to use the power of Balaam against Israel, but the Aqedah causes God to choose Israel.<sup>38</sup>

God reveals to Balaam that He had spoken with the 'angels who work secretly' (LAB 18:5l). He starts this speech in LAB 18:5n with a quotation from Gen 18:17, where God decides to reveal to Abraham

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., James, *Biblical Antiquities*, 123; Harrington, 'Pseudo-Philo', 325; Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo*, 85; B.N. Fisk, 'Offering Isaac again and again. Pseudo-Philo's Use of the Aqedah as Intertext', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62 (2000) 481–507, esp. 484–5.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Jacobson, *Commentary*, 582.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 44:12, where הוֹצֵא (outside) is used as 'heaven'. See also 2 *Bar* 4:4.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.13:2–4; Targum Jonathan Gen 22:1.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. LAB 18:5i: 'I gave him back to his father'.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. BT *Yoma* 5a; *Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon* 4. Although Isaac's blood was not spilled, it does have expiatory value. LAB also refers to the Aqedah in 32:2–4 and 40:2.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Murphey, *Pseudo-Philo*, 86.

all the acts he is going to perpetrate with regard to Sodom. In *LAB*, this is applied to the election of Israel. The purpose of quoting Gen 18:17 is not completely clear. Perhaps one should look to the next verse (Gen 18:18) in which first the numerous offspring of Abraham and then the blessing are referred to: ‘Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him’. If this is true, this would mean that when Pseudo-Philo quotes Gen 18:17, he is in fact referring to Gen 18:18. However, I am not sure about this suggestion, because I am not aware of his using this technique elsewhere. It is nevertheless interesting to note that the first part of Gen 12:3 is quoted in *LAB* 18:6de, whereas the second part of the verse, ‘and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’, which is very much comparable to the second phrase of Gen 18:18, is not quoted. God also reveals the election to Jacob, who he calls ‘firstborn’. This revelation is based on an interpretation of the blessing in Genesis 32.

The final words of God to Balaam are a rhetorical question with regard to the proposal of Balaam to curse Israel (*LAB* 18:6cde). The implicit warning is that Balaam will not be blessed if he curses Israel. This is an application of the first promise to Abraham in the Bible: ‘*I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse*’ (Gen 12:3).

Three events in the history of the Patriarchs are cited by God as indications that Israel is a blessed people and cannot be cursed. First, the establishing of a covenant between God and Abraham (Gen 15) in *LAB* 18:5b–f; second, the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22) in *LAB* 18:5g–k; and third, Jacob’s wrestling with the angel of God (Gen 32) in *LAB* 18:6. Each of these events is marked with a blessing of Abraham and his descendants. Pseudo-Philo’s appropriation of Genesis might mirror the hermeneutics of Numbers 22–24 itself.<sup>39</sup> The parallel between the Abraham story and Balaam helps us to see the latter as a positive, sympathetic figure.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. B.N. Fisk, ‘Offering Isaac again and again. Pseudo-Philo’s Use of the Aqedah as Intertext’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62 (2000) 481–507 (esp. 485). Fisk points to several intertextual relations between Numbers 22–24 and Genesis 22 (cf. Fisk, ‘Offering Isaac’, 486–488). Also, other ancient interpreters combine the patriarchal stories and the Balaam narrative. Cf. Philo, *De Migratione* 109–119, Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.6.4.

*The second invitation (LAB 18:7g–9)*

The additions with regard to the second invitation (LAB 18:7g–9) mainly portray Balak,<sup>40</sup> although possibly something is also said of the destiny of Balaam. In the eyes of Balak, holocausts will reconcile God with men (LAB 18:7ij). This is apparently necessary, as Balak thinks that God will not help him because of his sins (cf. LAB 18:7m). He asks Balaam to offer as many sacrifices as necessary to win God's favour (LAB 18:7kl). Both God and Balaam will profit, as Balaam will have a reward, and God his offerings (LAB 18:7no). There is no clear connection with the text of Numbers. It is probable that the words of Balak in LAB 18:7i–o are related to Num 22:16d–17b: 'Let nothing hinder you from coming to me, for I will surely do you great honor, and whatever you say I will do'. In LAB, Balak says what he thinks what could prevent Balaam from cursing Israel, which is the same as what prevents Balaam from doing what Balak commands. In LAB, the mention of the offering of great honor to Balaam (Num 22:17a) is not mentioned with regard to the second invitation, but is transferred to the first invitation (LAB 18:2l). However, the 'reward' mentioned in LAB 18:7n: 'You will have your reward', could be used instead of the 'great honor' found in Num 22:17a. It is also possible to connect the reward with Num 22:18c: 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold'. The remark that God will be reconciled with men if he gets his holocausts (cf. LAB 18:7i–j) has no counterpart in the biblical text, but possibly refers to LAB 18:5g–j. Because Abraham was ready to offer his son, he is a chosen one. Balak is trying to exceed this offer. God asks for Abraham's son (LAB 18:5g) in order that Israel be blessed, yet Balak offers God more in LAB 18:7l: 'as many holocausts as he wishes'. Balak wishes to persuade God with gifts, and to purchase a decision with money (cf. LAB 18:11d; cf. also 18:10c, 12r). The offering as such does play an important part in Numbers. Every time Balaam receives an oracle, he brings an offering (Num 23:1–2, 14–15, 27–30). This is paralleled only once in LAB (18:10bc) because there is only one oracle.

Balaam's answer to this second invitation of Balak contains two additions (LAB 18:8), which are difficult to interpret. With regard to the first addition (LAB 18:18bc), one should point to some disagreement among

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo*, 86.

the manuscripts.<sup>41</sup> One manuscript, LAB 18:8b, reads as follows: ‘Ecce *insipiens* est filius Sephor’, which can be translated: ‘Lo, the son of Sephor is foolish’.<sup>42</sup> The other reading is ‘Ecce *inspiciens* est filius Sephor’ which is translated by Harrington as follows: ‘Behold the son of Zippor is looking around’.<sup>43</sup> Jacobson translates it: ‘Behold the son of Zippor is a seer’. He takes the following ‘et’ as representating an adversative *waw*: ‘*but* he does not recognize that he dwells among the dead’.<sup>44</sup> In any case, the addition seems to stress that Balaam evaluates Balak in a negative way and indeed consults God again. He also goes along with Balak, as in the biblical text. However, in the eyes of Balaam, Balak does not recognize that he dwells among the dead (LAB 18:8c). Possibly, this means that wicked people, even if they are still alive, are called dead.<sup>45</sup> The consequence of this is that Balak’s prayers and offerings will be of no consequence, because only the living can praise God.

With regard to the second addition (LAB 18:8hi), it is possible to interpret 18:8h: ‘And your way will be a stumbling block’, in the light of 18:8i: ‘And that Balak will go to ruin’. In this interpretation, both sentences contain a reference to Balak.<sup>46</sup> The way of Balaam will be a stumbling block for Balak, who will be ruined by this. Balaam remains, at this point of the text, a positive figure. It is also possible, however, to read both sentences independently. In that case, it is not immediately clear for whom Balaam’s way is a stumbling block.<sup>47</sup> One manuscript (π) adds *tibi* after 18: 8h: ‘And your way will be a stumbling block *for you*’. In this case, 18:8h can be related to Balaam, whereas 18:18i deals with Balak. Consequently, both will be visited by bad luck as a consequence of Balaam’s visit. This is supported by LAB 18:11m–o: ‘For I know that, because I have been persuaded by Balak I have lessened the time of my life’. If this interpretation is correct, it is the first time in LAB 18 that Balaam’s destiny is mentioned. Until the second consultation

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Jacobson, *Commentary*, 590.

<sup>42</sup> So James, *Biblical Antiquities*, 124; Kish, *Liber Antiquitatum*, 160.

<sup>43</sup> Harrington, *Pseudo-Philo*, 87.

<sup>44</sup> Jacobson, *Commentary*, 591.

<sup>45</sup> See Jacobson, *Commentary*, 591, with reference to Babylonian Talmud *Berachot* 18b; Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 39:7. Harrington, ‘Pseudo-Philo’, 325, note k, suggests that Balak (!) ‘does not recognize that the idols are dead’. See also James, *Biblical Antiquities*, 124; Perrot and Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon*, 126 suggest that Balak the seer does not know his own destiny. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo*, 87, says that Balak has a human way of reasoning, and therefore lacks knowledge of God’s ways.

<sup>46</sup> Jacobson, *Commentary*, 591.

<sup>47</sup> Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo*, 87.



with God, Balaam is pictured as a prophet on the side of Israel, who refuses to be swayed by Balak. However, God's permission to his request to go with Balak (18:8f-i) contains Balaam's destruction. The transformation of the story of the ass in *LAB* supports this interpretation. After Balaam departs with the messengers (18:8jk), the biblical story of the ass is very much shortened in *LAB* 18:9. Neither God's anger, nor the angel's sword, nor the speaking ass are mentioned. In *LAB*, the episode is reduced to a revelation of the angel and a summon to hurry. God's anger and the opposition of the angel are summarized in the preceding words of God to Balaam: 'Your way will be a stumbling block' (18:8h). In a certain way, an internal contradiction in the text of the Bible is solved. In the biblical text, God first permits Balaam to go, but when he does, God becomes angry. In *LAB*, the permission to go is directly linked to the coming destiny of Balaam.

*The Discourse of Balaam (LAB 18:10-13)*

In the rewriting of the first and second invitation, Balaam is valued positively. Pseudo-Philo does not give any negative interpretation of Balaam at places where other early Jewish and Christian authors do so. Balaam is not able to curse Israel, and seems to be a figure similar to Abraham. He nevertheless goes to God for a second time, but this is in conformity with the biblical text. The formulation of God's second permission possibly anticipates the future destiny of Balaam. The positive evaluation of Balaam seems also to be present in the discourse (*LAB* 18:10-13). Balaam does not curse Israel, although Balak asks this of him (cf. *LAB* 18:10h-n). On the contrary, he condemns Moab and acknowledges the power of God (*LAB* 18:11c, 12e-g). At the same time, however, some negative characteristics of Balaam are given. The spirit of God does not abide in Balaam (*LAB* 18:10e, 11l), and his last hour has come (*LAB* 18:11m-12a, 12h-p). He admits that he has been led astray by Balak, and therefore he is not blessed, even though he blesses Israel (*LAB* 18:11mn, 12ij, 12no). After Balak has said to Balaam that God has cheated him (18:12qr), Balaam even gives negative advice concerning Israel (18:13a-i). Thus, in this last part of *LAB* 18, a shift in the evaluation of Balaam takes place, from a positive evaluation of Balaam who blesses Israel, to that of a prophet who will not be blessed and who even gives negative advice about Israel. It is difficult, however, to point to exactly where the change takes place and for what reason. Therefore, below I will examine some further aspects of this part of the text.

The arrival of Balaam after his journey with the messengers is described in *LAB* 18:10 very concisely: ‘And he came into the land of Moab’ (10a). In the biblical text, the meeting of Balaam and Balak is described quite extensively (Num 22:36–38). In *LAB* 18:10b–f, Balaam carries out the offerings immediately after his arrival in the land of Moab and even before he makes contact with Balak. In the Bible, Balak is the first to carry out the offerings (Num 22:39–40), while later on they either undertake them together (Num 23:2), or Balak is present when Balaam makes the offerings (Num 23:14), or Balak carries them out himself (Num 23:30). In *LAB*, Balak is not mentioned when Balaam sees Israel (*LAB* 18:10d), whereas in Numbers, they see the people together (Num 22:41; 23:13; 24:2). Pseudo-Philo seems to avoid giving the impression that Balaam is collaborating with Balak at this point in the text.

In *LAB*, the discourse of Balaam is not preceded by an encounter between Balaam and God (cf. Num 23:4–10, 16–24), nor by the mention that the spirit of God came upon him (Num 24:2–9). In *LAB*, it seems as if Balaam utters his discourse without divine approval. *LAB* 18:10e: ‘And when he saw part of the people, the spirit of God did *not* abide in him’ has a parallel in the biblical text, Num 24:2c: ‘And the spirit of God came upon him’. These parallel texts, however, are contradictory in meaning. In *LAB*, Balaam loses the spirit, whereas in Numbers he receives it. It seems as if, according to Pseudo-Philo, the oracle of Balaam is delivered while the spirit is absent. At the beginning of the chapter (*LAB* 18:3d), Balaam says to Balak that the spirit is given only for a time. This seems to imply that Balaam realizes that the spirit will not always rest in him. In *LAB* 18:11l, it is said that only a little is left of the spirit, which is tantamount to saying that there is nothing left.<sup>48</sup> According to Levison, the reason for changing Num 24:2 is probably the ambivalence of Pseudo-Philo with regard to ascribing to the spirit of God the delivering of an oracle to a prophet who is not from Israel, and who in the end led Israel astray. The spirit remains in Balaam, only to allow him to deliver his oracle. Whereas Pseudo-Philo is dependent on Scripture to ascribe the oracle of Balaam to the spirit, he contradicts this by adding a negative: ‘the spirit of God did *not* abide in him’.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Levison, ‘Prophetic Inspiration’, 321.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Levison, ‘Prophetic Inspiration’, 321–2. Jacobson (*Commentary*, 594) has some problems accepting the fact that *LAB* 18:10e has a text that is contradictory to the biblical text. He suggests the deletion of the negation, but this does not satisfy him either, since it would mean that there was already the spirit of God in Balaam. According

In the discourse of Balaam (*LAB* 10:10h–12o), his message is that he cannot curse Israel, because it is indestructible (*LAB* 18:10h–n). Israel is God’s heritage (v. 11a), and God has great commitment to his people (v. 11hi). Israel’s light is more brilliant than the splendour of lightning (v. 12c) and its course swifter than an arrow (v. 12d). In addition to these positive remarks with regard to Israel, Balaam expresses himself negatively about Moab (v. 12c–g), whereas the destiny of Balak, who tried to persuade God with gifts (v. 11d), is compared with that of Pharaoh, who tried to reduce Israel to slavery (v. 11ef).

One can conclude that the general picture of Balaam as described in *LAB* 18 is a positive one, he is a prophet of Israel. However, two elements in the discourse seem to contradict this conclusion. In the first place, Balaam alludes to his own fate and coming end (*LAB* 18:11j–12a). He is restrained in his speech (*LAB* 18:11j) and cannot say what he sees with his eyes (*LAB* 18:11k). In *LAB* 18:12 he also speaks in a negative way about himself. His last hour seems to have come (*LAB* 18:12a). He gnashes his teeth (*LAB* 18:12h). The fact that he was persuaded by Balak is given as the reason why he has lost time in his life (*LAB* 18:11no). Although it is not completely clear, I think that here Pseudo-Philo is referring to the fact that Balaam listened to Balak a second time concerning the possibility of cursing Israel. After the first consultation, it was clear that God did not wish Balaam to meet Balak (cf. *LAB* 18:7). The fact that he listened to Balak a second time is possibly what is meant by his transgression (*LAB* 18:12ij). Although God gave Balaam permission to meet Balak, and although his message remains positive for Israel, Balaam is still blamed.<sup>50</sup> Balaam seems to be aware of the fact that it was because of this transgression that he was not blessed, despite the fact that he had blessed Israel and cursed Moab (*LAB* 18:12no). This element seems to be in contradiction with the implication of *LAB* 18:6de: ‘But if you curse them, who will be there to bless you?’, but his subsequent consultation with God seems to give a turn to his destiny. This is clearly anticipated in the formulation of God’s second statement

to Jacobson, this is questionable, and against the biblical text that says that the spirit comes upon Balaam. He suggests therefore the following textcritical solution. Originally the text probably reads: ‘there was a spirit’ (ἐγένετο πνεῦμα), which became through a mistake in writing, ‘the spirit of God abides’ (ἐμενε το πνεῦμα). In Greek this is only a small change. In a later stage, a copyist did not like this and he added a negation (‘the spirit of God did not abide’).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo*, 89.

giving permission for Balaam to meet Balak in LAB 18:8h: ‘And your way will be a stumbling block’. The integration of the coming end of Balaam within his prophecy solves the contradiction in the biblical text that suggests that a prophet who is blessing Israel (Numbers 22–24) will also soon meet his end (cf. Num 31:8).

In the second place, after Balaam ended his discourse, he grew silent (LAB 18:12p). The spirit of God left him. Balak’s reaction is one of dissatisfaction with the blessing of Israel and the cursing of Moab, and he blames God for this (LAB 18:12qr). It is only after Balaam has finished his discourse that he gives negative advice about Israel to Balak—Israel can only be defeated when it sins: ‘Come and let us plan what you should do to them. Pick out the beautiful women who are among us and in Midian, and station them naked and adorned with gold and precious stones before them. When they see them and lie with them, they will sin against their Lord and fall into your hands; for otherwise you cannot fight against them’ (LAB 18:13). In the biblical text, Balaam has already gone home before the people of Israel begin to have sexual relations with the daughters of Moab. Pseudo-Philo, however, explicitly states that Balaam had counselled Balak to use the women. He borrows this negative point from another biblical story rather than Numbers 22–24. It refers to the story of Baal Peor (Numbers 25), which is ascribed to Balaam in Num 31:16: ‘These women here, on Balaam’s advice, made the Israelites act treacherously against the Lord in the affair of Peor...’. The formulation in Num 31:16 is not completely clear, since ‘on Balaam’s advice’ is the translation of the Hebrew בְּדִבְרֵי בָלָעַם which means literally ‘in the word (matter) of Balaam’. However, the text suggests that Balaam has at least something to do with it. In LAB, the advice of Balaam is interwoven into the story about his prophecy.<sup>51</sup> The closure of the text mentions his advice once again, but Pseudo-Philo seems to put the responsibility mainly on the shoulders of Balak: ‘And afterward the people were seduced after the daughters of Moab. For Balak did everything that Balaam had showed him’ (LAB 18:14de).

<sup>51</sup> It is possible that the negative advice of Balaam reflects the introduction of the fourth oracle: ‘Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days’ (Num 24:14b). In Numbers, it is clear that ‘this people’ is Israel, and ‘your people’ is Moab. Possibly Pseudo-Philo turns this around: ‘Come and let us plan what you (Balak) should do to them (Israel)’ (LAB 18:13b).

By integrating this negative aspect of the portrayal of Balaam into the story of Numbers 22–24, Pseudo-Philo tries to harmonize the contrasting passages in the Bible with regard to the portrayal of Balaam. What is important here, is that Balaam's negative advice is delivered only after his prophecy is complete. The spirit of God has left Balaam, and only then does he give this counsel. Balaam's advice to seduce Israel is not a prophecy. He does not curse Israel. As a prophet under the inspiration of the spirit of God, Balaam did the right thing. Only without this inspiration is Balaam able to give negative advice to Balak.

### *Conclusion*

Pseudo-Philo combines the positive portrayal of Balaam with a negative one, through a gradual diminishing of the spirit. At the end of his oracle, LAB speaks about a prophet at the end of his life. Although he did not curse Israel, he is misled by Balak, and therefore he will soon come to his end, and will not be blessed by God. Only after he ends his oracle, is he able to give his negative advice to Balak. Pseudo-Philo integrates Numbers 22–24 not only with Num 31:16, but also with texts such as Num 31:8 that predict the coming end of Balaam. The change in the characterization of Balaam mainly takes place at the end of his discourse, but is already anticipated by the answer of God at the second consultation.

## APPENDIX

A SYNOPTIC OVERVIEW OF NUMBERS 22:2–25:1 AND  
PSEUDO-PHILO, *LIBER ANTIQUITATUM BIBLICARUM* 18

In the following synoptic overview I give the texts of Numbers and Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 18 in the English translation. Biblical verses are quoted according to the *Revised Standard Version* with slight modifications. Quotations from the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* are from D.J. Harrington, ‘Pseudo-Philo’, in: J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, II*, London 1985, 297–377, based on the Latin edition of the text edited in D.J. Harrington, *Pseudo-Philon. Les Antiquités Bibliques, I* (SC 229), Paris 1976, 148–57, also with slight modifications. The modifications are made at points where the comparison of these texts would otherwise have been troubled.

I put in SMALL CAPS the elements of Numbers which do not occur in *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, and vice versa, i.e., the OMISSIONS and ADDITIONS. In ‘normal script’ are the elements that corresponds in both texts, i.e., the verbatim quotations of one or more words of the source text in *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*. I put in *italics* all *variations* between Numbers and *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* other than addition or omission. The verbatim quotations and the modifications of them can occur in the same word order or sentence-order in *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* as in Numbers. However, sometimes there is a rearrangement of words and sentences. I underline those elements.

I. *The Exposition (Num 21:21–22:1 // LAB 18:1–2c)*

Numbers 22	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18
[Cf. Num 21:21–22:1]	1a <u>In that time</u> , MOSES KILLED SIHON AND OG, THE KINGS OF THE AMORITES, b AND HE HANDED OVER ALL THEIR LAND TO HIS OWN PEOPLE, c AND THEY DWELLED IN IT. [ ]
2 AND BALAK THE SON OF ZIPPOR SAW ALL THAT ISRAEL HAD DONE TO THE AMORITES.	
[cf. Num 22:5d]	2a <u>Balak [ ] was king of Moab,</u> b <u>and he was living opposite them,</u> c <u>and he was very much afraid [ ].</u>
3a <i>And Moab was in great dread</i> OF THE PEOPLE, b BECAUSE THEY WERE MANY; c MOAB WAS OVERCOME WITH FEAR OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.	[ ]
4a AND MOAB SAID TO THE ELDERS OF MIDIAN: b ‘THIS HORDE WILL NOW LICK UP ALL THAT IS ROUND ABOUT US, c AS THE OX LICKS UP THE GRASS OF THE FIELD’.	
4d <u>Balak THE SON OF ZIPPOR was king of Moab in that time.</u>	

II. *The First Invitation* (Num 22:5–14 // LAB 18:2d–7f)**Numbers 22****Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 18**

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|--|---|
| <p>5a He sent MESSENGERS to Balaam the son of Beor [ ] <i>at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of Amaw</i> to call him, saying:<br/> b ‘Behold, A PEOPLE HAS COME OUT OF EGYPT;<br/> c THEY COVER THE FACE OF THE EARTH,<br/> d <u>and they are dwelling opposite me.</u> [cf. Num 22:6f–h]</p> <p>6a And now come,<br/> b [ ] curse this people FOR ME,<br/> c because they are too <i>mighty</i> for me; [cf. Num 22:17a]<br/> d PERHAPS I SHALL BE ABLE TO DEFEAT THEM<br/> e AND DRIVE THEM FROM THE LAND;<br/> f FOR I KNOW THAT<br/> g HE WHOM YOU BLESS IS BLESSED,<br/> h AND HE WHOM YOU CURSE IS CURSED’.</p> <p>7a SO THE ELDERS OF MOAB AND THE ELDERS OF MIDIAN DEPARTED WITH THE FEES FOR DIVINATION IN THEIR HAND;<br/> b AND THEY CAME TO BALAAM,<br/> c AND GAVE HIM BALAK’S MESSAGE.<br/> 8a And <i>he</i> said TO THEM:<br/> [ ]</p> <p>b ‘Lodge here this night,<br/> c and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me’;<br/> d SO THE PRINCES OF MOAB STAYED WITH BALAAM.</p> | <p>2d And he sent [ ] to Balaam the son of Beor, THE INTERPRETER OF DREAMS, <i>who lived in Mesopotamia</i>, and commanded him, saying:<br/> e ‘Behold [ ]</p> <p>[cf. LAB 18:2b]<br/> I KNOW THAT IN THE REIGN OF MY FATHER ZIPPOR, WHEN THE AMORITES FOUGHT HIM, YOU CURSED THEM<br/> h AND THEY WERE HANDED OVER BEFORE HIM.<br/> i <i>And now come</i><br/> j AND <i>curse this people</i> [ ],<br/> k because they are too <i>many</i> for us,<br/> l <u>and I will do you great honor’.</u><br/> [ ]</p> <p>[cf. LAB 18:2g–h]</p> <p>3a And <i>Balaam</i> said [ ]:<br/> b ‘BEHOLD THIS HAS GIVEN PLEASURE TO BALAK,<br/> c BUT HE DOES NOT KNOW THAT THE PLAN OF GOD IS NOT LIKE THE PLAN OF MAN.<br/> d NOW HE DOES NOT REALIZE THAT THE SPIRIT THAT IS GIVEN TO US IS GIVEN FOR A TIME.<br/> e BUT OUT WAYS ARE NOT STRAIGHT UNLESS GOD WISHES IT.<br/> f <i>And now wait here,</i><br/> g <i>and I will see what the Lord may say to me this night’.</i><br/> [ ]</p> |
|--|---|

Table (*cont.*)

Numbers 22	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18
9a And God CAME TO BALAAM and said [ ]:	4a And God [ ] said TO HIM BY NIGHT:
b ‘Who are <i>these</i> men <i>with</i> you?’	b ‘Who are <i>the</i> men <i>who have come to</i> <i>you</i> ?’
10a And Balaam said TO GOD:	c And Balaam said [ ]:
b ‘BALAK THE SON OF ZIPPOR, KING OF MOAB, HAS SENT TO ME, SAYING:	[ ]
11a “BEHOLD, A PEOPLE HAS COME OUT OF EGYPT,	
b AND IT COVERS THE FACE OF THE EARTH;	
c NOW COME,	
d CURSE THEM FOR ME;	
e PERHAPS I SHALL BE ABLE TO FIGHT AGAINST THEM	
f AND DRIVE THEM OUT”.’	
[ ]	d ‘WHY, LORD, DO YOU TRY THE HUMAN RACE?
	c THEY CANNOT ENDURE IT,
	f BECAUSE YOU KNOW WELL WHAT IS TO HAPPEN IN THE WORLD,
	g EVEN BEFORE YOU FOUNDED IT.
	h AND NOT ENLIGHTEN YOUR SERVANT IF IT BE RIGHT TO GO FORTH WITH THEM’.
12a <i>God</i> said to <i>Balaam</i> :	5a And <i>he</i> said to <i>him</i> :
b ‘YOU SHALL NOT GO WITH THEM;	[ ]
c YOU SHALL NOT CURSE THE PEOPLE,	
d FOR THEY ARE BLESSED’.	
[ ]	b ‘IS IT NOT REGARDING THIS PEOPLE THAT I SPOKE TO ABRAHAM IN A VISION,
(cf. Gen 15:1)	c SAYING:
(cf. Gen 22:17 / 15:5)	d “YOUR SEED WILL BE LIKE THE STARS OF THE HEAVEN”,
(cf. Gen 15:5a?)	e WHEN I LIFTED HIM ABOVE THE FIRMAMENT
(cf. <i>Test. Abr.</i> 10–14; 2 <i>Bar</i> 4:4)	f AND SHOWED HIM THE ARRANGEMENTS OF ALL THE STARS?
(cf. Gen 22:1–19)	g AND I DEMANDED HIS SON AS A HOLOCAUST.
	h AND HE BROUGHT HIM TO BE PLACED ON THE ALTAR,
	i BUT I GAVE HIM BACK TO HIS FATHER,
	j AND, BECAUSE HE DID NOT REFUSE, HIS OFFERING WAS ACCEPTABLE BEFORE ME,
	k AND ON ACCOUNT OF HIS BLOOD I CHOSE THEM.



Table (cont.)

Numbers 22	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18
(cf. Gen 18:17)	l AND THEN I SAID TO THE ANGELS WHO WORK SECRETLY: m "I WILL REVEAL EVERYTHING I AM DOING TO ABRAHAM"
(cf. Gen 32:25–30)	6a AND TO JACOB HIS SON, THE THIRD ONE WHOM I CALLED FIRSTBORN b WHO, WHEN HE WAS WRESTLING IN THE DUST WITH THE ANGEL WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF HYMNS, WOULD NOT LET HIM GO UNTIL HE BLESSED HIM". c AND DO YOU PROPOSE TO GO FORTH WITH THEM TO CURSE WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN? d BUT IF YOU CURSE THEM, e WHO WILL BE THERE TO BLESS YOU?'
(cf. Gen 12:3)	
13a And Balaam arose in the morning, b and said TO THE PRINCES OF BALAK: c 'Go to your own land; d because the LORD has refused to let me go with you'. 14a And the princes of Moab rose b and went to Balak, c and said: d 'Balaam refuses to come with us'.	7a And Balaam arose in the morning, b and said [ ]: c 'Be on your way, d because God does not wish me to come with you'. e And they set out f and told Balak what was said by Balaam.

## III. The Second Invitation (Num 22:15–35 // LAB 18:7g–9)

Numbers 22	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18
15a And Balak again sent <i>princes, more in number and more honorable than they</i> . 16a AND THEY CAME TO BALAAM b and said TO HIM: c 'THUS SAYS BALAK THE SON OF ZIPPOR: d "LET NOTHING HINDER YOU FROM COMING TO ME; 17a for I will surely do you great honor, b AND WHATEVER YOU SAY TO ME I WILL DO; c COME, d CURSE THIS PEOPLE FOR ME".' [ ]	7g And Balak again sent <i>other men</i> [ ] to Balaam, h saying [ ]: [ ] [cf. LAB 18: 21] i 'BEHOLD I KNOW THAT WHEN YOU OFFER HOLOCAUSTS TO GOD, j GOD WILL BE RECONCILED WITH MEN. k AND NOW ASK EVEN STILL MORE FROM YOUR LORD

Table (*cont.*)

Numbers 22	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18
	l AND BEG WITH AS MANY HOLOCAUSTS AS HE WISHES. m BUT IF HE SHOULD BE PROPITIATED REGARDING MY EVIL DEEDS, n YOU WILL HAVE YOUR REWARD o AND GOD WILL RECEIVE HIS OFFERINGS <sup>7</sup> .
18a And Balaam ANSWERED b AND said to <i>the servants of Balak</i> : c ‘THOUGH BALAK WERE TO GIVE ME HIS HOUSE FULL OF SILVER AND GOLD, d I COULD NOT GO BEYOND THE COMMAND OF THE LORD MY GOD, TO DO LESS OR MORE. [ ]	8a And Balaam [ ] said to <i>them</i> : [ ] b “BEHOLD THE SON OF ZIPPOR IS LOOKING AROUND c AND HE DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THAT HE DWELLS AMONG THE DEAD. d And now wait here this night, e and I will <i>see</i> what [ ] God will say to me <sup>8</sup> .
19a And now wait here this night also, b and I will <i>know</i> what MORE the Lord will say to me <sup>9</sup> .	
20a And God CAME TO BALAAM AT NIGHT AND said to him: b ‘IF THE MEN HAVE COME TO CALL YOU, c RISE, d go with them; e BUT ONLY WHAT I BID YOU, THAT SHALL YOU DO <sup>10</sup> . [ ]	f And God [ ] said to him: [ ] g ‘Go with them, [ ] h AND YOUR WAY WILL BE A STUMBLING BLOCK, i AND THAT BALAK WILL GO TO RUIN <sup>11</sup> .
21a <i>Balaam</i> rose in the morning, b AND SADDLED HIS ASS, c and went with <i>the princes of Moab</i> .	j <i>He</i> rose in the morning [ ] k and set out with <i>them</i> .
22a BUT GOD’S ANGER WAS KINDLED b BECAUSE HE WENT; c AND THE ANGEL OF THE LORD TOOK HIS STAND IN THE WAY AS HIS ADVERSARY. d AND HE WAS RIDING ON THE ASS, e AND HIS TWO SERVANTS WERE WITH HIM. 23a AND THE ASS SAW THE ANGEL OF THE LORD STANDING IN THE ROAD, WITH A DRAWN SWORD IN HIS HAND; b AND THE ASS TURNED ASIDE OUT OF THE ROAD, c AND WENT INTO THE FIELD;	

Table (*cont.*)

Numbers 22	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18
<p>d AND BALAAM STRUCK THE ASS, TO TURN HER INTO THE ROAD.</p> <p>24a THEN THE ANGEL OF THE LORD STOOD IN A NARROW PATH BETWEEN THE VINEYARDS, WITH A WALL ON EITHER SIDE.</p> <p>25a AND WHEN THE ASS SAW THE ANGEL OF THE LORD, b SHE PUSHED AGAINST THE WALL, c AND PRESSED BALAAM'S FOOT AGAINST THE WALL; d SO HE STRUCK HER AGAIN.</p> <p>26a THEN THE ANGEL OF THE LORD WENT AHEAD, b AND STOOD IN A NARROW PLACE, WHERE THERE WAS NO WAY TO TURN EITHER TO THE RIGHT OR TO THE LEFT.</p> <p>27a When the ass [ ]  saw the angel of THE LORD, b she lay down beneath <i>Balaam</i>; c AND BALAAM'S ANGER WAS KINDLED, d AND HE STRUCK THE ASS WITH HIS STAFF.</p> <p>28a THEN THE LORD OPENED THE MOUTH OF THE ASS, b AND SHE SAID TO BALAAM: c 'WHAT HAVE I DONE TO YOU, d THAT YOU HAVE STRUCK ME THESE THREE TIMES?'</p> <p>29a AND BALAAM SAID TO THE ASS: b 'BECAUSE YOU HAVE MADE SPORT OF ME. c I WISH I HAD A SWORD IN MY HAND, d FOR THEN I WOULD KILL YOU'.</p> <p>30a AND THE ASS SAID TO BALAAM: b 'AM I NOT YOUR ASS, UPON WHICH YOU HAVE RIDDEN ALL YOUR LIFE LONG TO THIS DAY? c WAS I EVER ACCUSTOMED TO DO SO TO YOU?' d AND HE SAID: e 'No'.</p> <p>31a And <i>the Lord</i> opened Balaam's eyes, b and he saw the angel of THE LORD STANDING IN THE WAY, WITH HIS DRAWN SWORD IN HIS HAND; c <i>and he bowed his head,</i> d <i>and fell on his face.</i></p>	<p>9a And the ass CAME BY WAY OF THE WILDERNESS b AND saw an angel and lay down beneath <i>him</i>.</p> <p>c And <i>he</i> opened Balaam's eyes, d and he saw the angel  e <i>and adored him on the ground.</i></p>

Table (*cont.*)

Numbers 22	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18	
32a	AND THE ANGEL OF THE LORD SAID TO HIM:	
b	‘WHY HAVE YOU STRUCK YOUR ASS THESE THREE TIMES?’	
c	BEHOLD, I HAVE COME FORTH TO WITHSTAND YOU,	
d	BECAUSE YOUR WAY IS PERVERSE BEFORE ME;	
33a	AND THE ASS SAW ME,	
b	AND TURNED ASIDE BEFORE ME THESE THREE TIMES.	
c	IF SHE HAD NOT TURNED ASIDE FROM ME,	
d	SURELY JUST NOW I WOULD HAVE SLAIN YOU	
e	AND LET HER LIVE’.	
34a	THEN BALAAM SAID TO THE ANGEL OF THE LORD:	
b	‘I HAVE SINNED,	
c	FOR I DID NOT KNOW THAT THOU DIDST STAND IN THE ROAD AGAINST ME.	
d	NOW THEREFORE, IF IT IS EVIL IN THY SIGHT, I WILL GO BACK AGAIN’.	
35a	And the angel of the LORD said to <i>Balaam</i> :	f And the angel [ ] said to <i>him</i> :
b	‘Go with the men;	g ‘Hurry
		h and be gone,
c	but only the word which I bid you, that shall you speak’.	i because whatever you say will come to pass (for him)’.
d	SO BALAAM WENT ON WITH THE PRINCES OF BALAK	[ ]

IV. *The Discourse(s) of Balaam (Num 22:36–24:24 // LAB 18:10–13)*

Numbers	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18
(cf. 22:36–40)	10a And he came into the land of Moab
(cf. 23:1–2a, 14b, 29–30a)	b and built an altar
(cf. 23:2b, 14c, 30b)	c and offered sacrifices.
(cf. 22:41c; 24:1c–2b)	d And when he saw part of the people,
(cf. 24:2c)	e the spirit of God did not abide in him.
(cf. 23:7a, 18a, 24:3a, 15a)	f And he took up his discourse
(cf. 23:7b, 18b, 24:3b, 15b)	g and said:
	h ‘Behold Balak brought me to the mountain,

Table (cont.)

Numbers 22	<b>Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18</b>
i	saying:
j	“Come, run into the fire of those men”.
k	What fire the waters will not
l	extinguish, I cannot resist;
m	but the fire that consumes water,
n	who will resist that?”
o	And he said to him:
p	‘It is easier to take away the
q	foundations of the topmost part of
r	the earth and to extinguish the
s	light of the sun and to darken the
t	light of the moon than for anyone
u	to uproot the planting of the Most
v	Powerful or to destroy his vine.
w	And he (Balak) did not know that
x	his consciousness was conceited so
y	as to hasten his own destruction.
11a	For behold I see the heritage that
b	the Most Powerful has shown me
c	by night.
d	and behold the days will come,
e	and Moab will be amazed at what
f	is happening to it
g	because Balak wished to persuade
h	the Most Powerful with gifts and to
i	buy a decision with money.
j	Should you not have asked about
k	what he sent upon Pharaoh and
l	his land
m	because he wished to reduce them
n	to slavery?”
o	Behold an overshadowing and
p	highly desirable vine, and who will
q	be jealous because it does not
r	wither?
s	But if anyone says to himself that
t	the Most Powerful has labored in
u	vain or has chosen them to no
v	purpose,
w	behold now I see the salvation and
x	liberation that will come upon
y	them.
z	I am restrained in my speech
aa	and cannot say what I see with
ab	my eyes,
ac	because there is little left of the
ad	holy spirit that abides in me.
ae	For I know that,

Table (*cont.*)

Numbers 22	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18
	<p>n because I have been persuaded by Balak</p> <p>o I have lessened the time of my life.</p> <p>12a And behold my remaining hour.</p> <p>b Behold again I see the heritage and the dwelling place of this people.</p> <p>c And its light will shine more brilliantly than the splendor of lightning,</p> <p>d and its course will be swifter than that of an arrow.</p> <p>e And the time will come</p> <p>f and Moab will groan,</p> <p>g and those serving Chemosh who have plotted these things against them will be made weak.</p> <p>h But I will gnash my teeth,</p> <p>i because I have been led astray</p> <p>j and have transgressed what was said to me by night.</p> <p>k And my prophecy will remain public,</p> <p>l and my words will live on.</p> <p>m And the wise and understanding will remember my words that,</p> <p>n when I cursed, I perished</p> <p>o but though I blessed, I was not blessed’.</p> <p>p On saying these words he grew silent.</p> <p>q And Balak said:</p> <p>r ‘Your God has cheated you of many gifts from me’.</p> <p>13a And then Balaam said to him:</p> <p>b ‘Come and let us plan what you should do to them.</p> <p>c Pick out the beautiful women who are among us and in Midian,</p> <p>d and station them naked and adorned with gold and precious stones before them’.</p> <p>e And when they see them</p> <p>f and lie with them,</p> <p>g they will sin against their Lord</p> <p>h and fall into your hands;</p> <p>i for otherwise you cannot fight against them’.</p>
(cf. 23:11, 25; 24:10–11)	
(cf. 23:12, 26; 24:12–14)	
(cf. Num 25:1; 31:16)	

*V. The Closure of the Story (Num 24:25–25:1 // LAB 18:14)*

<b>Numbers 24</b>	<b>Pseudo-Philo, <i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> 18</b>
<p>[ ]</p> <p>25a And Balaam <i>rose</i>,</p> <p>b <i>and he went</i></p> <p>c and returned to his place;</p> <p>c AND BALAK ALSO WENT HIS WAY.</p> <p>1a WHILE ISRAEL WAS STAYING AT SHITTIM,</p> <p>b [ ] the people <i>began to have sexual relations with</i> the daughters of Moab.</p> <p>[ ]</p>	<p>14a AND ON SAYING THIS,</p> <p>b Balaam <i>turned away</i></p> <p>c and returned to his place.</p> <p>[ ]</p> <p>d AND AFTERWARD the people <i>were seduced after</i> the daughters of Moab.</p> <p>e FOR BALAK DID EVERYTHING THAT BALAAM HAD SHOWED HIM.</p>